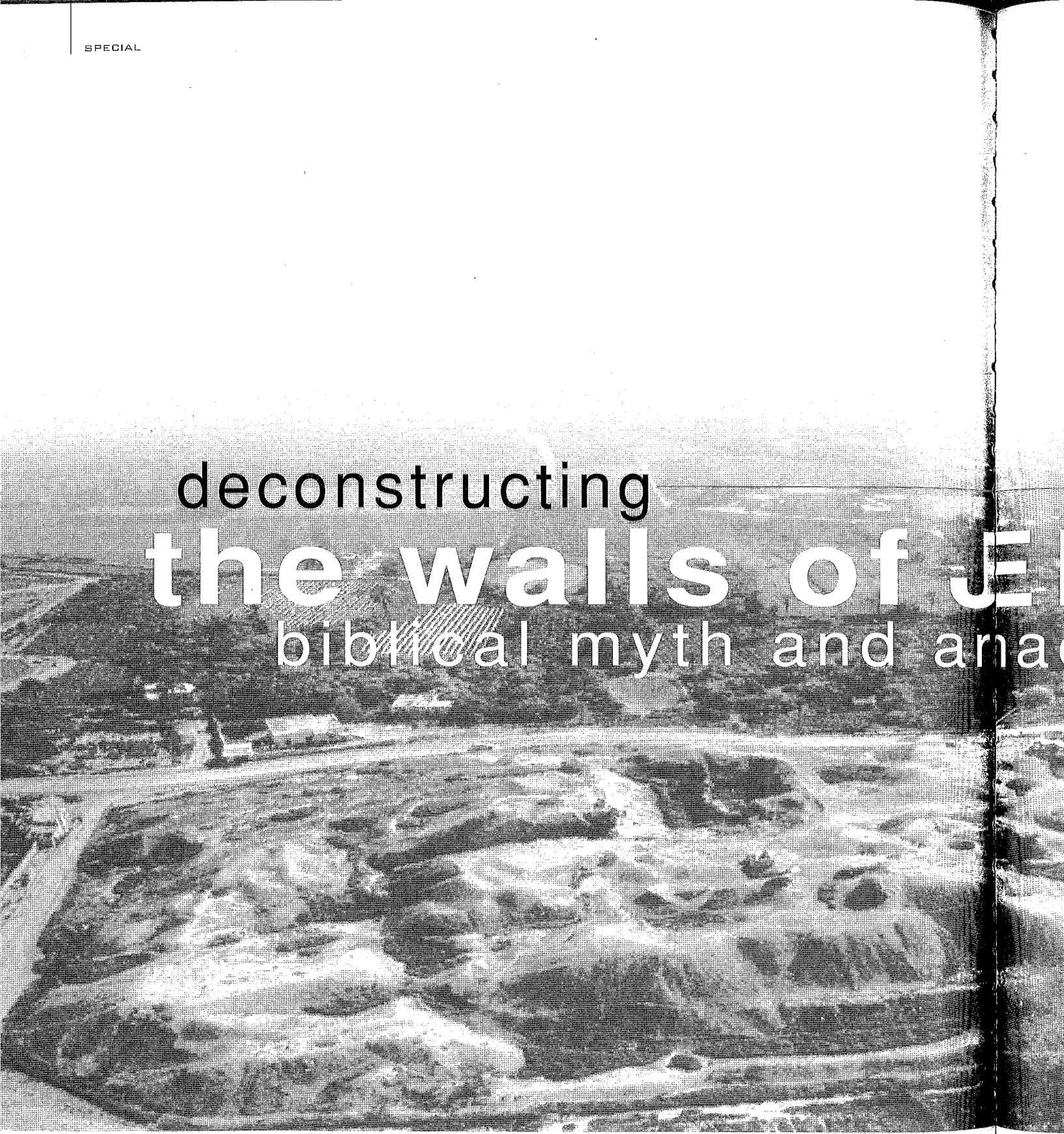
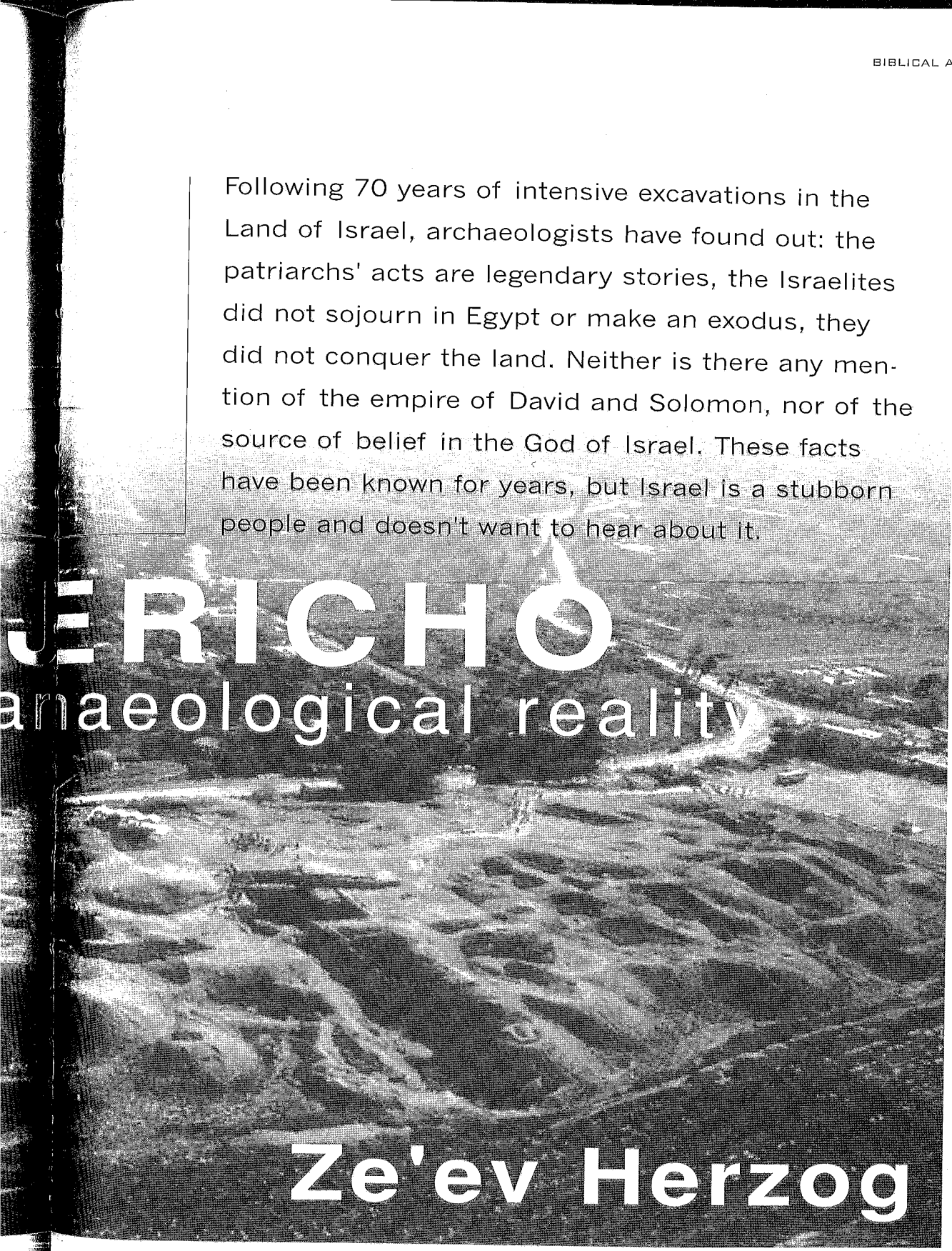


deconstructing the walls of JE

biblical myth and ana

Following 70 years of intensive excavations in the Land of Israel, archaeologists have found out: the patriarchs' acts are legendary stories, the Israelites did not sojourn in Egypt or make an exodus, they did not conquer the land. Neither is there any mention of the empire of David and Solomon, nor of the source of belief in the God of Israel. These facts have been known for years, but Israel is a stubborn people and doesn't want to hear about it.



JERICHO

archaeological reality

Ze'ev Herzog



Mud dried brick from Jericho

Archaeology, the Bible and Ideology

During the last twenty years a veritable revolution has been taking place in the way Israeli scholars view the Bible as a reliable historical source. Most scholarship in the fields of biblical studies, archaeology, and ancient Jewish history is in agreement that historical developments in the formative stages of the People of Israel were utterly different from those found in the Bible. Nonetheless, such views have not percolated into the awareness of the public at large. Most Israelis (as well as Jews in the Diaspora) would still be shocked to read such conclusions as these: that the Israelites did not sojourn in Egypt, did not wander in the wilderness, did not conquer the land of Canaan in a military campaign, and did not pass it on to the Twelve Tribes of Israel. There would be even less readiness to accept the view that the united monarchy of David and Solomon, which was described in the Bible as a regional superpower, was, at most, a small tribal kingdom. The contentions that Yahweh (Jehovah), the God of Israel, had a spouse, and that ancient Israelite religion adopted monotheism only toward the end of the monarchy, would meet with scepticism and dismissal in the public at large.

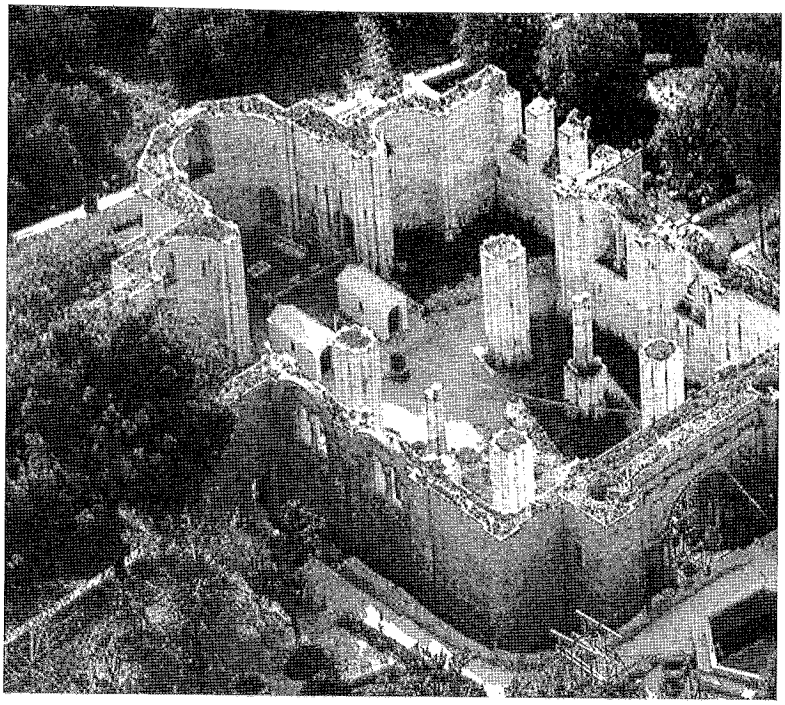
the Israelites did not sojourn in Egypt, did not wander in the wilderness, did not conquer the land of Canaan in a military campaign, and did not pass it on to the Twelve Tribes of Israel

The discussion that I would like to stimulate is concerned with the history and philosophy of knowledge, and with the interaction between science and society. In the early 1960s the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn established the principle that the sciences do not develop continuously, but instead, in certain abrupt shifts whereby all the rules of the game change.[1] These shifts Kuhn called 'scientific revolutions', and the rules of the game he called 'paradigms'. I should like to argue that the archaeology of the Land of Israel is undergoing a scientific revolution as Kuhn defined it. The paradigmatic shift centres on the liberation of this archaeology from the biblical approach, which limited its boundaries, and on the movement toward a societal approach, which broadens its horizons.

The Flowering of Biblical Archaeology

The archaeology of Palestine as a science developed rather late, toward the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, in tandem with the archaeology of the imperial cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. These empires abounding in resources were the first target of the researchers, who were looking for impressive evidence from the past to enrich the collections of the great museums in London, Paris, and Berlin with statuary and other artistic treasures. The conditions in ancient Palestine, with its fragmented geographical diversity, were inhospitable for the development of an extensive kingdom, and certainly no showcase projects such as the Egyptian shrines or the Mesopotamian palaces could have been established there. In contrast, the archaeology of Palestine developed out of religious impulse, as the principal impetus for archaeology there was the relationship of the land to the Holy Scriptures. The first excavators in Jericho and Shechem (Nablus) were biblical scholars searching for vestiges of the biblical cities.

The development of archaeology must be viewed against the background of prevailing approaches in biblical research. The school of biblical criticism that flourished in Germany from the second half of the 19th century, of which Julian Wellhausen was a leading figure, challenged the historicity of the biblical narrative and contended that biblical historiography was formulated and largely 'invented' during the Babylonian exile. Biblical scholars argued that the history of the People of Israel as a sequence of events, beginning in the era of Abraham and ending with the Conquest of the Land and the Settlement of the Tribes, consisted merely of later reconstructions of the past for theological purposes.



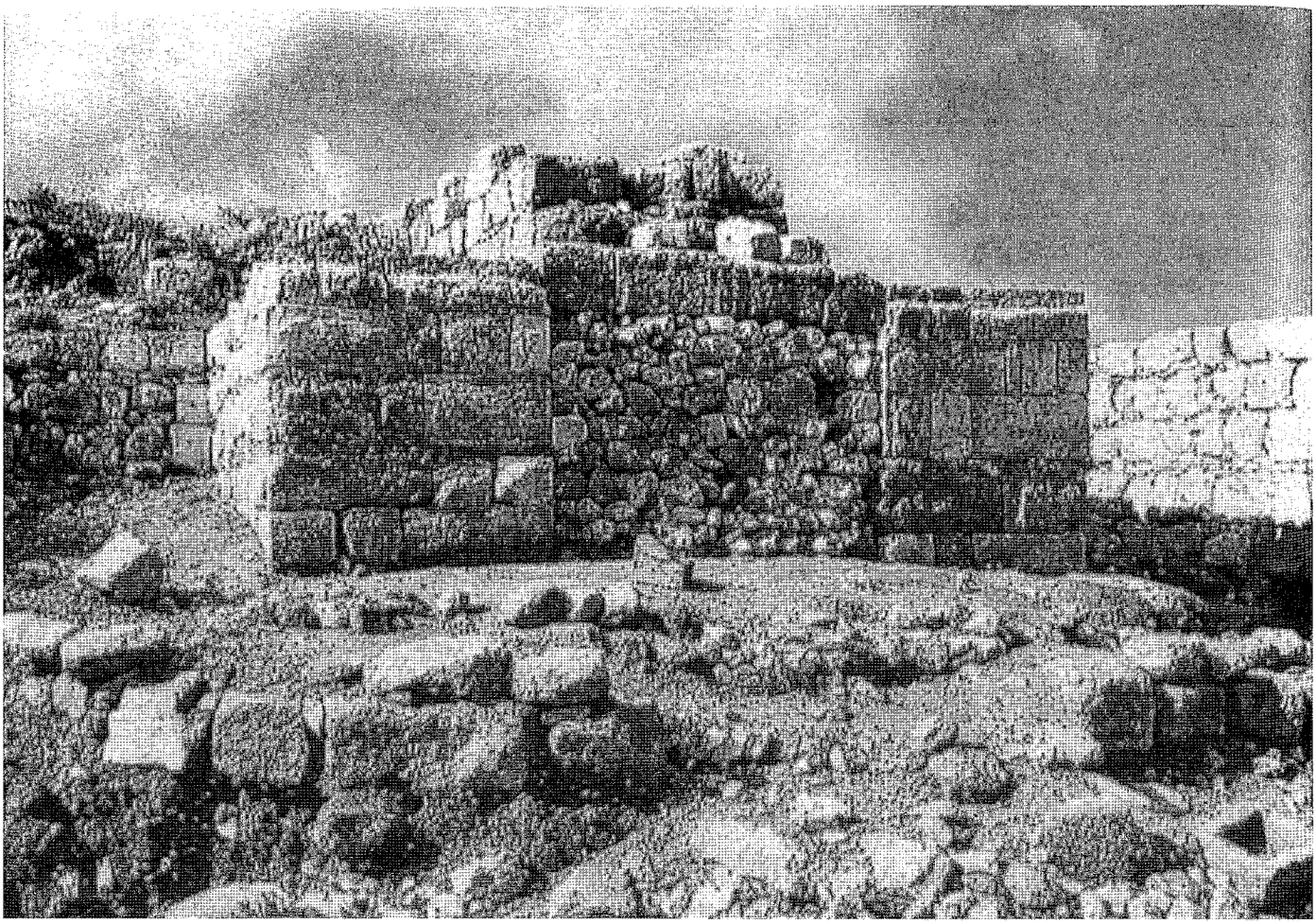
Jacob's Well, Nablus

Archaeology assumed momentum with the activity of William Foxwell Albright, who mastered the archaeology, history, and linguistics of the Land of Israel and the ancient Near East. Albright, an American whose father was a priest of Chilean descent, began excavating in Palestine in the 1920s. Albright's avowed approach as that archaeology is the principal scientific means to refute the critical views of the Wellhausen School regarding the historicity of biblical narratives. Albright believed that the Bible is an historical document, and though it underwent several editorial stages, it fundamentally reflects ancient reality. He was convinced that as ancient relics were discovered in Palestine, they would provide unambiguous proof of the historicity of recorded events relating to the People of Israel in its land.

According to Kuhn's analysis, a science is at the paradigmatic stage when it is stable and sure of itself. In the history of the archaeology of Israel, this description suits the authority of the school of 'biblical archaeology'.[2] Albright and his students G. Ernest Wright, Nelson Glueck, David Noel Freedman, and John Bright developed the archaeological exploration of ancient Israel – within the

1. Kuhn, T.S. (1970), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

2. Albright, W.F. (1957), From *Stone Age to Christianity*, Garden City, NY.



Gate at Megiddo

context of the ancient Near East – as a science dealing with the discovery of antiquities and with the reconstruction of the ancient history of the land of Israel in connection with written sources, chiefly the Bible. The 'biblical archaeology' approach was adopted and developed by the founders of scientific archaeology in Israel: Benjamin Mazar, Na'aman Avigad, Yigael Yadin, Yohanan Aharoni, Ruth Amiran and Avraham Biran. Beginning in the 1950s these excavator-scholars, and their students, persisted in exploring the Bronze and Iron Ages. Fully confident in our way, we aspired, consciously or unconsciously, to uncover the biblical past with the aid of archaeology. The dominant theory confidently prevailed by universal agreement in the discipline of archaeology, as did the feeling that the puzzle was nearing successful completion.

The 'biblical' approach is prominent both in the names and in the content of all the basic books of the discipline. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, compiled by Yohanan Aharoni, presents a map locating 'Abraham and Isaac in the Land Canaan: early Second Millennium BC.'[3] Yigael Yadin's work *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* titles chapter four, which deals with the Middle Bronze Age, 'The Period of the Patriarchs', while chapter five, which treats the Late Bronze Age, is titled 'Sojourn & Exodus: Moses & Joshua'.[4] The relationship between archaeological eras and biblical narratives was considered self-evident and incontrovertible.

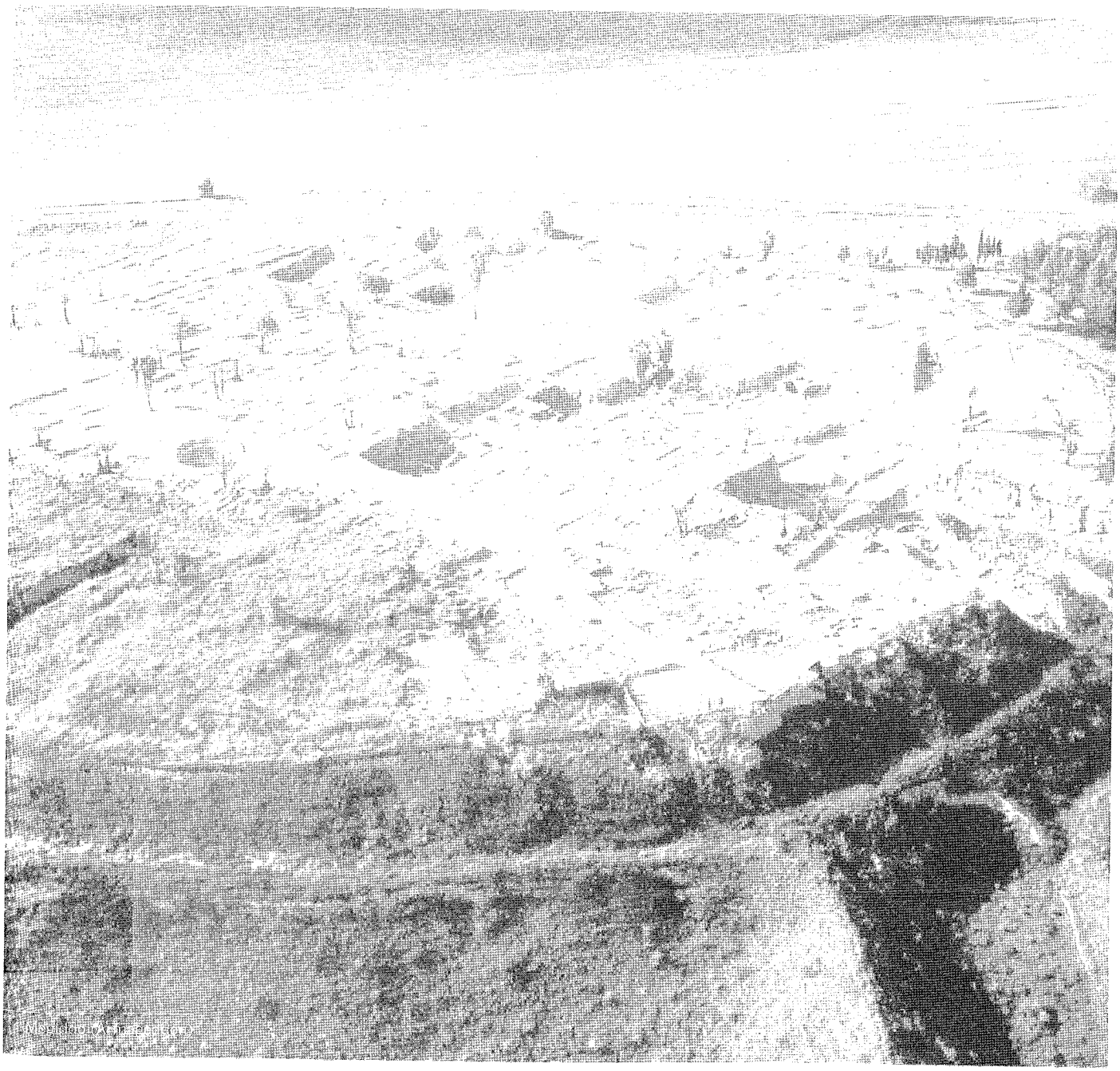
In the same spirit we 'found' evidence for incidents that fitted biblical narratives. We found the gate through which Abraham entered Dan, Abraham's well in Beersheba, the Midianite sanctuary at Arad, Baal Perazim in Giloh, Joshua's altar at Mount Ebal, the destruction at Hazor wrought by Joshua, evidence for the Israelite shrine at Shiloh, Solomon's Mines at Timna, the 'City of David' in Jerusalem, Solomonic gateways at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, the stables of Solomon (or of Ahab) at Megiddo, and even Mount Sinai at Mount Karkum in the Negev.

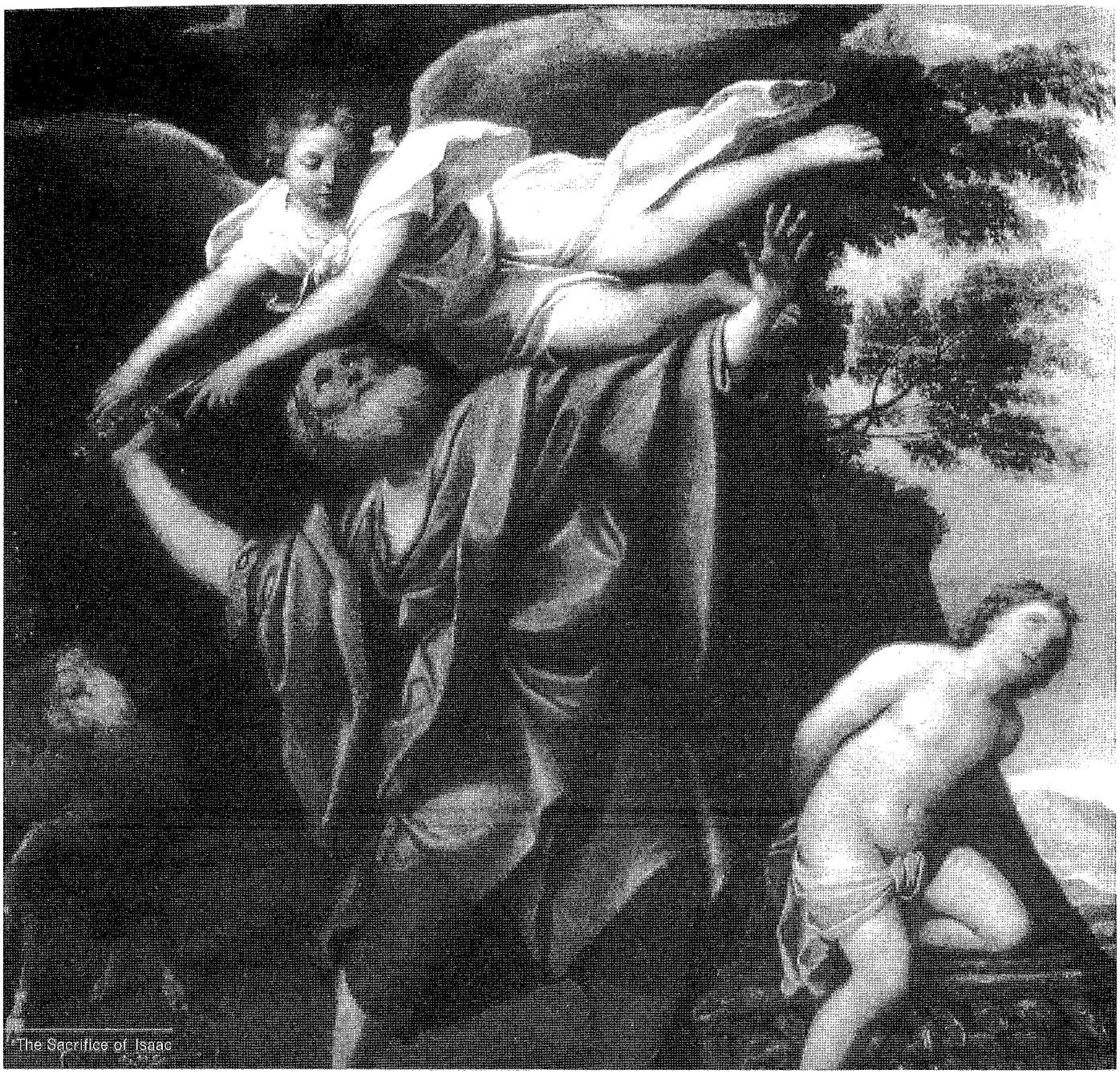
The archaeology of the Land of Israel had evidently achieved its goal, which was to harmonize the picture of the past from the correspondence of literary sources and archaeological discovery. The

3. Aharoni, Y. and Avi-Yona, M. (1977), *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, Macmillan, London.

4. Yadin, Y. (1963), *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands.*

The relationship between archaeological eras and biblical narratives was considered self-evident and incontrovertible





The Sacrifice of Isaac

many archaeological discoveries began to undermine the historical credibility of the biblical account rather than to reinforce it

creation of a detailed typology of artefacts and datable building remains made it possible to associate them with the historical events described in the literary sources. Moreover, correspondences between Egyptian history and archaeology, for example, the mention of Pharaoh Shishak's military campaign to Palestine both in the Bible and in Egyptian reliefs, made it possible to establish Israelite chronology firmly. The puzzle appeared close to completion.

The Crisis: Findings Contradict the Bible

Little by little cracks began to appear in the picture. Paradoxically, many archaeological discoveries began to undermine the historical credibility of the biblical account rather than to reinforce it. According to Kuhn's formulation, a crisis stage precedes the scientific revolution. In the crisis stage 'anomalies' that refute the basic assumptions of the paradigm and undermine its applicability come to light. So it happened that many finds discovered during archaeological excavations and in ancient documents proved, to their discoverers' surprise, contradictory to the biblical narrative or chronology. The solutions proffered for the resolution of the anomalies were awkward and forced, not founded on data, but deriving from the wishful thinking of the researchers. The explanations became ponderous and inelegant, and the signs of crisis had begun to appear. Here are a few examples of that illustrate this crisis and how the harmonious picture collapsed.

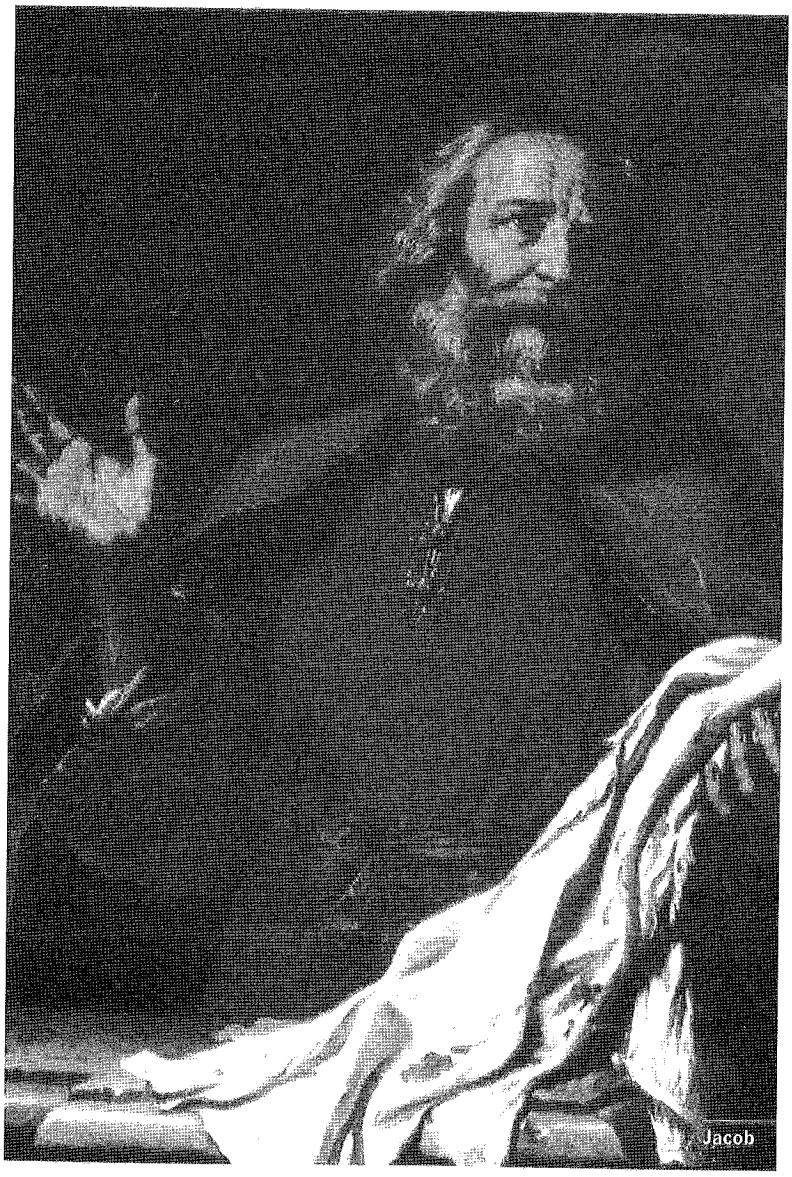
The Patriarchal Period

The Patriarchal narratives were one of the first sections of the Bible to be put to the test. Scholars were hard pressed to agree about the archaeological era that fits the patriarchal period. When did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live? According to biblical chronology, Solomon built the Temple 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt (I Kings 1:1). To that date one must add 430 years, to encompass the sojourn in Egypt (Exodus 12:40), as well as the vast life-times of the Patriarchs, whereupon one determines a date in the 21st century BCE for Abraham's migration to Canaan.

In the early 1960s Albright tried to date the era of Abraham's wanderings to the Intermediate Bronze Age (or Middle Bronze Age I: 22nd to 20th centuries BCE), whereas others saw in that era the reflection of the Middle Bronze Age. Benjamin Mazar, the father of the Israeli branch of biblical archaeology, precipitated a significant shift in the matter in an article first published in 1967.[5] He considered what evidence the Patriarchal narratives provide for the Philistines, the Arameans, and the use of camels, matters not attested before the 12th century BCE. Therein he saw a clear sign that 'the way of life and the ethnic and social-political picture reflected in the patriarchal accounts generally correspond to the end of the period of the Judges and the beginning of the monarchy'.[6] Mazar thus undercut the continuity of biblical historiography: the historical background of the Patriarchs is not to be sought before the Descent into Egypt and the

5. Mazar, B. (1969), 'The historical background of the book of Genesis', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* : **28**, 73-83. This is the first English translation of the paper originally published in Hebrew in 1967.

6. ibid., 77.


Jacob

sojourn there, but hundreds of years thereafter, in the 11th and 10th centuries BCE which would place it in the settlement period. Accordingly, in the new edition of the *Macmillan Bible Atlas*, the maps bearing on the Patriarchs have been removed from their early second millennium context and located after the campaign of Merneptah (1208 BCE).[7]

The Exodus from Egypt

The many Egyptian documents known to us do not mention at all the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt or the later Exodus of an entire people. To be sure, many documents mention the practice of wandering shepherds (dubbed Shasu) to enter Egyptian territory in times of drought or famine and to settle at the fringes of the Nile delta. This was not an isolated occurrence, as it took place frequently over thousands of years. It was, therefore, not an unusual phenomenon.

The account of the Israelites' sojourn in the Land of Goshen, in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, has been disproved by the excavations at Tell Maskhuta, which is identified with biblical Pithom. The excavations reveal that after the destruction of the Middle Bronze Age city, the site was reoccupied only at the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th centuries BCE. According to the excavator, J.S. Holladay, the mention of Pithom in the account of the Sojourn in Egypt is an anachronism deriving from the experience of Judean exiles there at the time of Jeremiah.[8]

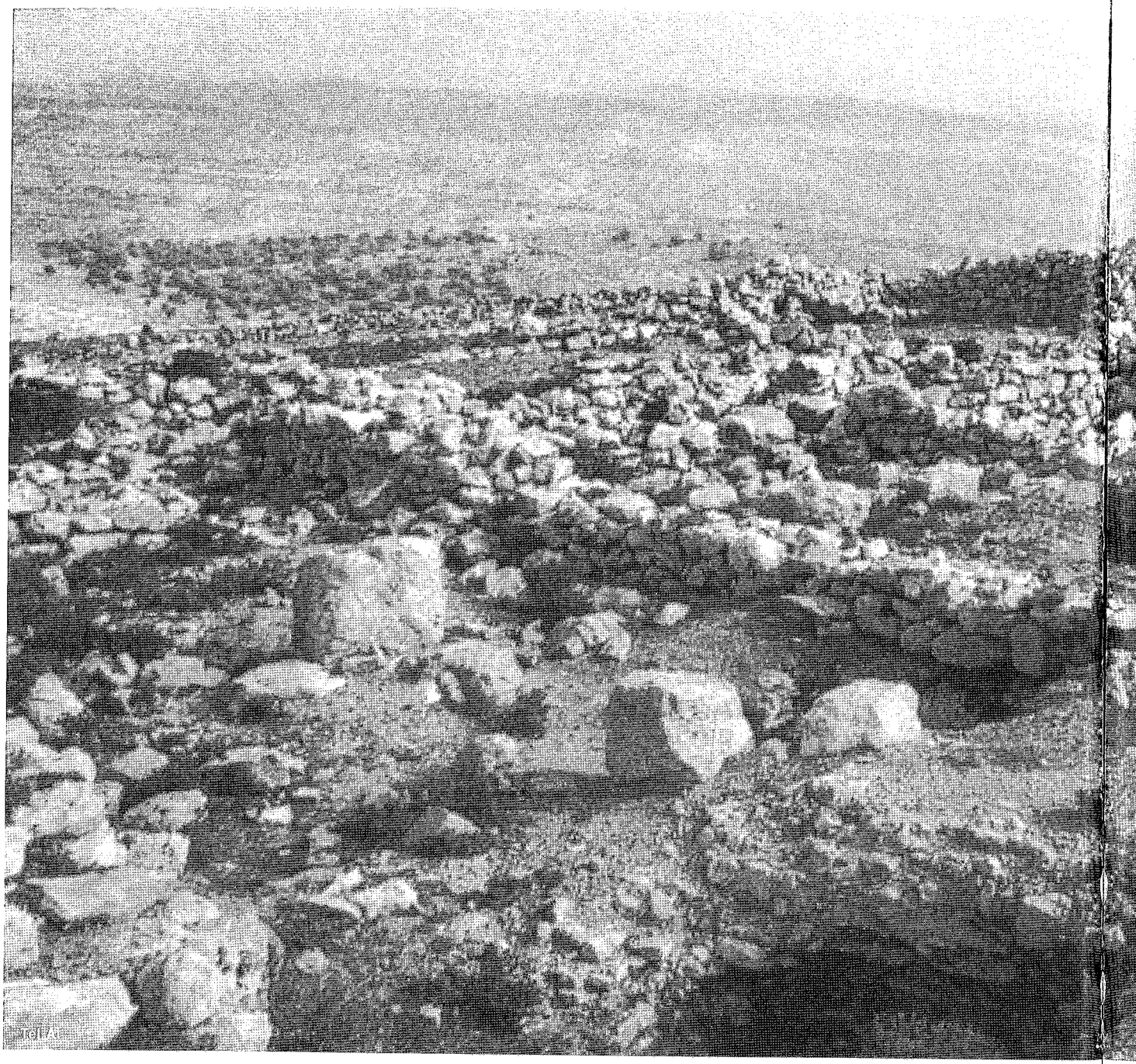
Generations of researchers have tried to locate the site of Mount Sinai and the encampments of the Israelite tribes in the wilderness. Despite the strenuous efforts, not even one site has been located that would accord with the biblical account. One of the most important places in this context is Kadesh Barnea, where the Israelites remained 'a long time' (Deuteronomy 1:46). Such an occupation ought to have left behind some traces. And yet the extensive excavations at Kadesh Barnea have made it clear that the site was first settled in the 10th century BCE! In light of this find, Amihai Mazar has declared: 'Systematic surveys and excavations at Kadesh Barnea and in the Beersheba and Arad valleys have not produced any archaeological evidence of the Late Bronze Age, the period to which the Exodus is commonly assigned.... Not one Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I shard was found in the



7. Aharoni, Y., Avi-Yona, M., Rainey, A.F. and Safrai, Z. (1993), *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, (3rd edition), Macmillan, New York. Map 44.

8. Holladay, J.S. (1997), 'Tell el-Maskhuta', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* : **3**, 432-439.





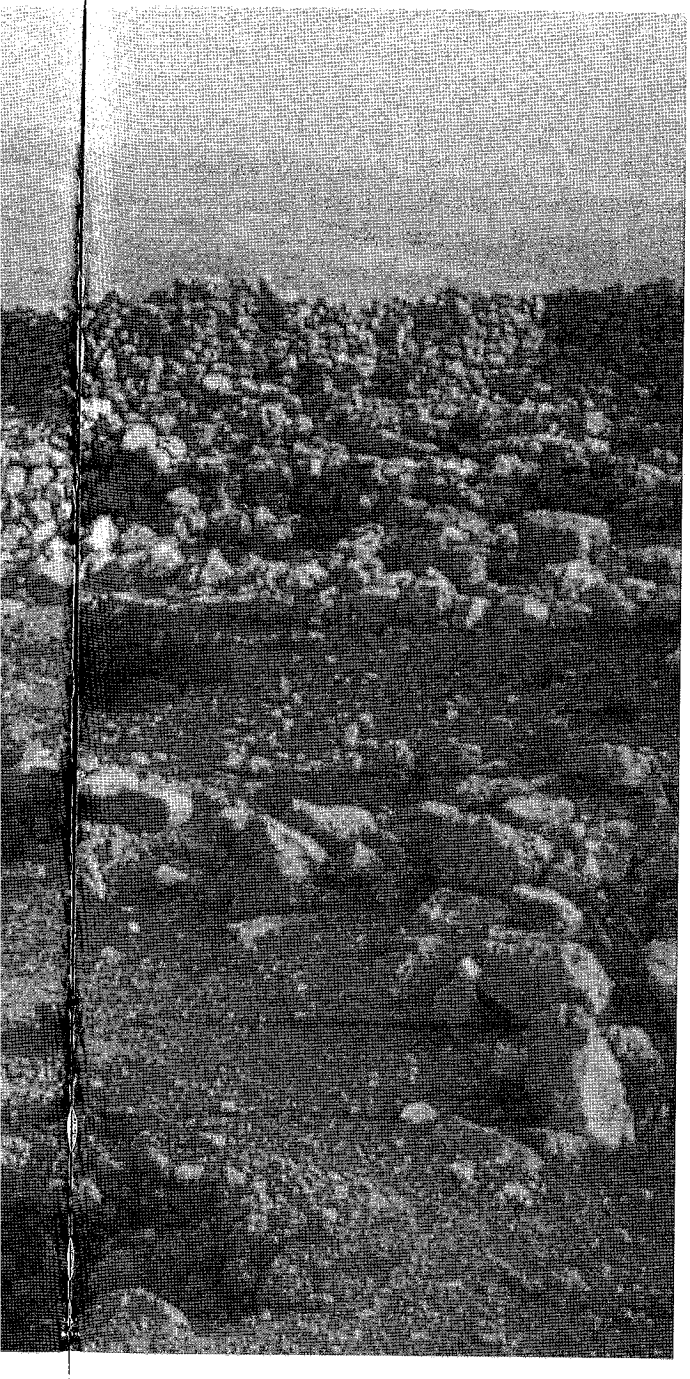
surveys, which combed the oasis of Kadesh Barnea and its vicinity, or in the systematic excavations of the mound.'[9] Despite such clear evidence, the force of tradition even today induces researchers 'to discover' Mount Sinai in the northern Hejaz or, as I have already mentioned, at Mount Karkom in the Negev highlands.

The central events of early Israelite history cannot be confirmed in extra-biblical documents or in archaeological findings.

Most contemporary historians agree that in the best possible scenario, several clans alone appropriated those events, whereas the originally separate accounts were broadened and 'nationalized' to suit the needs of a theological view of history.

The Conquest of the Land of Israel

In biblical historiography one of the fundamental elements in the formation of the People of Israel is the account of its Conquest of the Land and defeat of the Canaanites. Here, the most severe difficulties have arisen in the efforts to fix sites for



the archaeological evidence bearing on the biblical account of the Conquest. I'll cite, as an example, the research of Yohanan Aharoni in the Beersheba Valley. One of the goals of his investigation was to uncover the Late Bronze Age cities at Arad and at Hormah which, according to the accounts in *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, blocked the passage of the Israelites when they tried to penetrate the Land of Canaan from the south. After fifteen years of excavation at the tells of the Beersheba Valley, it was clear that they held no Late Bronze Age settlements. Accordingly, Aharoni took pains to state explicitly in the later edition of his book, *The Land of the Bible* : 'First of all, it has become clear that the tradition about the encounter of these tribes at the time of their arrival with the King of Arad... is not well founded historically.'[10]

The contradictions between archaeological findings and the tradition of a unified military conquest under Joshua have been known for decades. So far as I know, the late Yigael Yadin was the last archaeologist who upheld the historicity of the tradition. Kathleen Kenyon, the excavator of Jericho, established definitively that there is no support for the conjecture that Jericho was fortified with a city wall during the Late Bronze Age.[11] The arguments, either that the walls eroded, or that walls from the Middle Bronze Age were in continuous use, are unworthy excuses that we would hardly think of suggesting about any other period from which walls are absent. The second most important site in the account of the Conquest is Ai. During the excavations at the site identified as Ai, it became clear that this site had not been settled during the Late Bronze Age. Given the contradictions between the archaeological findings and the biblical account the stay can only be interpreted as an etiological legend.

After the research of Rivka Gonen, and mine on the archaeology of the Canaanite city, we know today that Jericho and Ai were not exceptional in the lack of walls.[12] It is clear now that no Canaanite cites in Palestine were fortified with walls. Archaeological findings fail to support Moses's words (Deuteronomy 9.1): 'Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and more populous than you, great cities with walls sky-high.' In reality, excavations at all the sites uncovered only unfortified settlements, while in many instances the site held only isolated structures of the ruler's palace and no actual city. Urban culture in Late Bronze Age Palestine was disintegrating in a process that lasted hundreds of years and was not the result of a military conquest. The emphasis of the biblical account on the might of the Canaanite cities may be explained as religious ideation intended to glorify God's saving acts as he fought on behalf of the Israelites.

It must be emphasized that the biblical account does not reckon at all with the political and military status of Egypt in Canaan in the 13th and 12th centuries BCE.[13] The Land of Israel was subject to Egyptian hegemony until the middle of

9. Mazar, A. (1992), 'The Iron Age I', in Ben-Tor (ed.) *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, Yale University Press, New Haven. 282.

10. Aharoni, Y. (1979), *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, Philadelphia. 215.

11. Bienkowski, P. (1986), *Jericho in the Late Bronze Age*, Warminster.

12. Gonen, R. (1984), 'Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Period', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* : **253**, 21-73; Herzog, Z. (1997), *Archaeology of the City: Urban planning in ancient Israel and its Social Implications*, Tel Aviv.

13. Singer, I. (1994), 'Egyptians, Canaanites, and Philistines in the period of the emergence of Israel', in Finkelstein, I. and Na'aman, N. (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: archaeology and historical aspects of early Israel*, Jerusalem. 282-338.

the 12th century BCE. The Egyptians administered this realm from centres they built at Gaza, Jaffa, and Beth Shean, while Egyptian finds have been discovered at many settlements on both sides of the Jordan. The predominance of Egypt in Palestine is not mentioned at all in the biblical account, and it is clear that it was unknown to both the biblical writer and to his redactors. Archaeological findings, then, plainly contradict the biblical picture of Canaan: the cities were not mighty and not fortified, and neither were their summits in the sky. The heroism of the conquerors, the few against the many, comprise a theological reconstruction which lacks any basis in fact.

Who was an Israelite?

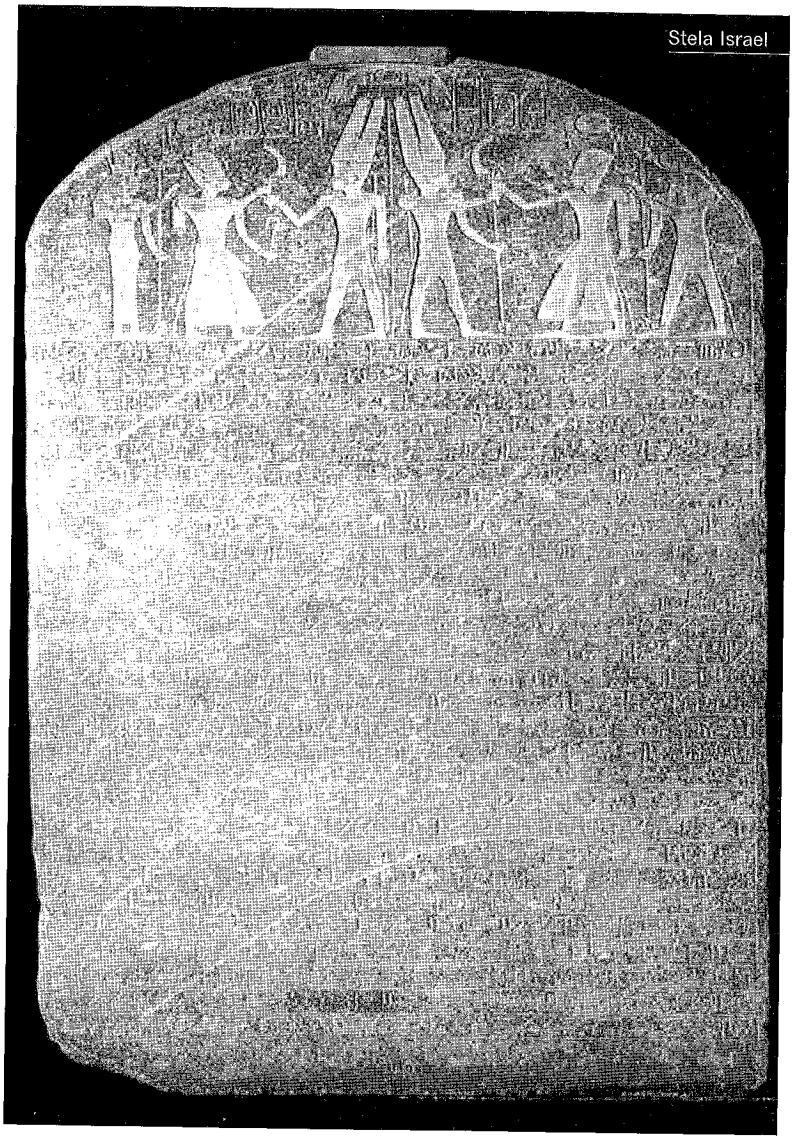
The conclusions of the preceding discussion about the formation of the People of Israel in stages, when taken together, require us to consider a fundamental question: the identity of the People of Israel. If there is no evidence for the Exodus from Egypt or for the wanderings wilderness, and if the biblical account of the military conquest of fortified cities is refuted by archaeology – who, then, were those ancient Israelites?

The name 'Israel' is mentioned in a solitary Egyptian document, 'the Israel Stela', from the time of Pharaoh Merneptah (1208 BCE)[14]:

Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe.
Ashkelon has been overcome,
Gezer has been captured,
Yano'am was made not existent;
Israel is laid waste (and) his seed is not,
Hurru has become a widow because of Egypt

Merneptah refers to the Land of Israel by its Canaanite name, and to several cities of the kingdom, as well as to a non-urban ethnic group. According to this piece of evidence, the term 'Israel' was applied to one of the population groups that dwelt in Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age, presumably in the central hill country where the kingdom of Israel was eventually established. This is a reality decidedly different from the biblical description of the Twelve Tribes of Israel that settled throughout the Land, on both sides of the Jordan.

Archaeological discoveries have unearthed an important fact: at the beginning of the Bronze


Stela Israel

If there is no evidence for the Exodus from Egypt or for the wanderings wilderness... is refuted by archaeology - who, then, were those ancient Israelites?

Age, the stage identified with the 'Period of Settlement', hundreds of small settlements were established in the area of the central hill region of the Land of Israel, inhabited by farmers who worked the land and raised sheep. If they did not come from Egypt, what is the origin of these settlers?

It seems to me that there are no longer any supporters of the biblical model of 'military conquest'. Some scholars still maintain the view that the Israelites were nomads who reached Palestine from trans-Jordan and pursued a 'quiet settlement' in the hill country.[15] While two American scholars, George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald, have developed a 'sociological theory', according to which the new settlers were Canaanites, residents of coastal villages, who grew to abhor the tyrannical rule of their kings. These farmers revolted by abandoning the city-states in the valleys, whereupon they settled in the hill country, which had previously been uninhabited. Israel Finkelstein, professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, has suggested that these settlers were shepherds who had wandered this region throughout the Late Bronze Age (their graves, unconnected to settlements, have been found).[16] According to his reconstruction, in the course of the Late Bronze Age the shepherds maintained a barter economy, meat in exchange for grains, with the inhabitants of the lowlands. As the urban and agricultural system of the valleys disintegrated, the nomads were forced to produce their own grains, and hence the incentive for fixed settlements arose.

In my analysis of the finds from this era in the Valley of Beersheba, I proposed that we free ourselves from a limited designation of ethnicity, and that we not look for a single, unitary source for the new population of settlers.[17] Basing myself on the variety of findings in Tell Masos, Tell Arad, and Beersheba, I suggested that we reconstruct a more complex settlement process, one in which the new settlers comprised population groups of varied origins: shepherds who had wandered in the northern Negev and then undertook a settled existence, farmers who had abandoned their villages on the coastal plain, and craftsmen who had worked in the royal courts that were disintegrating. They settled down together in the new areas that promised an improvement in living conditions. These settlements, continuing as they did in numerous respects the Canaanite cultural tradition, became 'Judean' or 'Israelite' only after they were drawn into the framework of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

Today all scholars realize to what great extent the Canaanite cultural tradition influenced the settlers at the beginning of the Iron Age. The polar opposition of Israelite and Canaanite is not what we have found. On the contrary, in every area of material culture, the continuity has become manifest. Already in 1963, Ruth Amiran, the eminent scholar of ceramics, was surprised at the similarity between the potsherds of Iron Age I and those of the Late Bronze Age: 'In the plates that we have compiled in this book it is evident that Israelite ceramics bear the burden of inheritance from the Canaanite ceramics.' Note the expression 'burden of Canaanite inheritance', which reveals, of course, not the burden of the ceramics, but that of the scholar herself. Amiran had already attributed the 'Canaanite heritage' to local inhabitants she identified as 'Hebrews'.[18] Interesting this passage was omitted from the English edition of the book.[19] Obviously, the solution that Amiran offers means that the settlers originated within the confines of the Land of Israel and not beyond it. This is a conclusion shared today by many scholars.

The United Kingdom

Archaeology has also been the source of a major adjustment in the reconstruction of the era known as the 'Period of the United Kingdom'. The Bible describes this time as the zenith of the political, military, and economic might of the People of Israel in ancient times. Following the conquests of David, the empire of David and Solomon stretched from the Euphrates to Gaza: 'For he controlled the whole region west of the Euphrates, all the kings west of the Euphrates from Tiphsah to Gaza' (I Kings 5.4). But archaeological findings at many sites have shown that the construction projects that the Bible attributes to this period are meagre in scope and extent.

The three cities mentioned among Solomon's building projects, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, have been extensively excavated at the levels corresponding to that era. Only half the area of the upper city of Hazor was fortified, an area of merely 3 hectares (out of a total area of 70 hectares occupied during the Bronze Age). At Gezer there was apparently only a fortress surrounded by a casemate wall covering a limited area; while Megiddo was not fortified at all with a

14. Na'aman, N. (1994), 'The "conquest of Canaan" in the book of Joshua and in history', in Finkelstein, I. and Na'aman, N. (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: archaeology and historical aspects of early Israel*, Jerusalem. 218-281.

15. The model developed by the German scholars Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, and adopted by Benjamin Mazar and Yohanan Aharoni.

16. Finkelstein, I. (1988), *Archaeology and the Israelite settlement*, Jerusalem. 122-149.

17. Herzog, Z. (1994), 'The Beersheba Valley' in Finkelstein, I. and Na'aman, N. (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: archaeology and historical aspects of early Israel*, Jerusalem. 122-149.

18. Amiran, R. (1963), *The Ancient Pottery of Eretz Yisrael*, Jerusalem (in Hebrew). 233-234.

19. Amiran, R. (1969), *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*, Jerusalem



Pillars of Hazor

wall. At other important cities, such as Lachish and Hebron, evidence of only sparse settlement has been found.

The picture becomes even more complicated in light of the excavations conducted in Jerusalem, capital of the United Monarchy. Extensive sections of the city have been excavated during the last 150 years. The excavations have revealed impressive remnants of the cities from the Middle Bronze Age and from Iron Age II (the era of the Kingdom of Judah). No remains of buildings have been found from the era of the United Monarchy (even according to the conventional chronology), only a few pottery shards.[20]

In view of the preservation of relics from the preceding and following eras, it is clear that in the era of David and Solomon Jerusalem was a small city, perhaps with a small royal citadel. In any event it was not the capital of an empire as described in the Bible: 'Archaeological findings may not be used to establish the existence of an Israelite empire in the time of David and Solomon, as described in the Bible. In order to approach the archaeological picture, it is necessary to peel away from the biblical accounts heavy layers of hyperbole, legendary and heroic embellishments that attached to the texts as the tradition was passed down over hundreds of years. Archaeological finds, despite their many limitations, are likely to provide the most valid criterion for evaluating the era as it truly was.'[21]

Even if the historical existence of David and Solomon is corroborated by the mention of 'The House of David' in the Aramaic inscription from Dan, and apparently in a Moabite inscription from Dibon, the existence of a great kingdom is highly doubtful. Additionally, two important facts must be borne in mind: first, that even the Bible does not mention the term 'united kingdom'; the failure to do so suggests, at the very least, the limitation of its scope to a tribal kingdom. Secondly, the account of Pharaoh Shishak's campaign (926 BCE according to Egyptian chronology) completely omits the existence of the Judean and Israelite kingdoms. Shishak's army travelled the length and breadth of Palestine, and the account mentions only the names of the towns and villages that he destroyed. Had Shishak encountered consolidated and mighty kingdoms

The authors of the biblical account knew Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE, with its wall and rich culture, remains of which were discovered in various parts of the city, and they projected this late picture back to the era of the united monarchy

20. Ussishkin, D. (1997), 'Jerusalem in the period of David and Solomon: the archaeological evidence', in Faust, A. and Baruch, E. (eds.) *New Studies on Jerusalem: Proceedings of the third conference, December 11th 1997*, Ramat-Gan (in Hebrew), 57-58.

21. Mazar, A. (1997), 'An evaluation of the United Kingdom in light of the archaeological evidence', in Faust, A. and Baruch, E. (eds.) *New Studies on Jerusalem: Proceedings of the third conference, December 11th 1997*, Ramat-Gan (in Hebrew), 60-68.

22. Finkelstein, I. (1996), *'The archaeology of the United Monarchy: an alternative view'*, *Levant* : **28**, 177-187.

there, the report of his campaign doubtless would have boasted of his victories over them, and he would not have been content merely to mention habitations. Hence the proposal that Solomon was a kind of local chieftain and not the potentate of an empire.

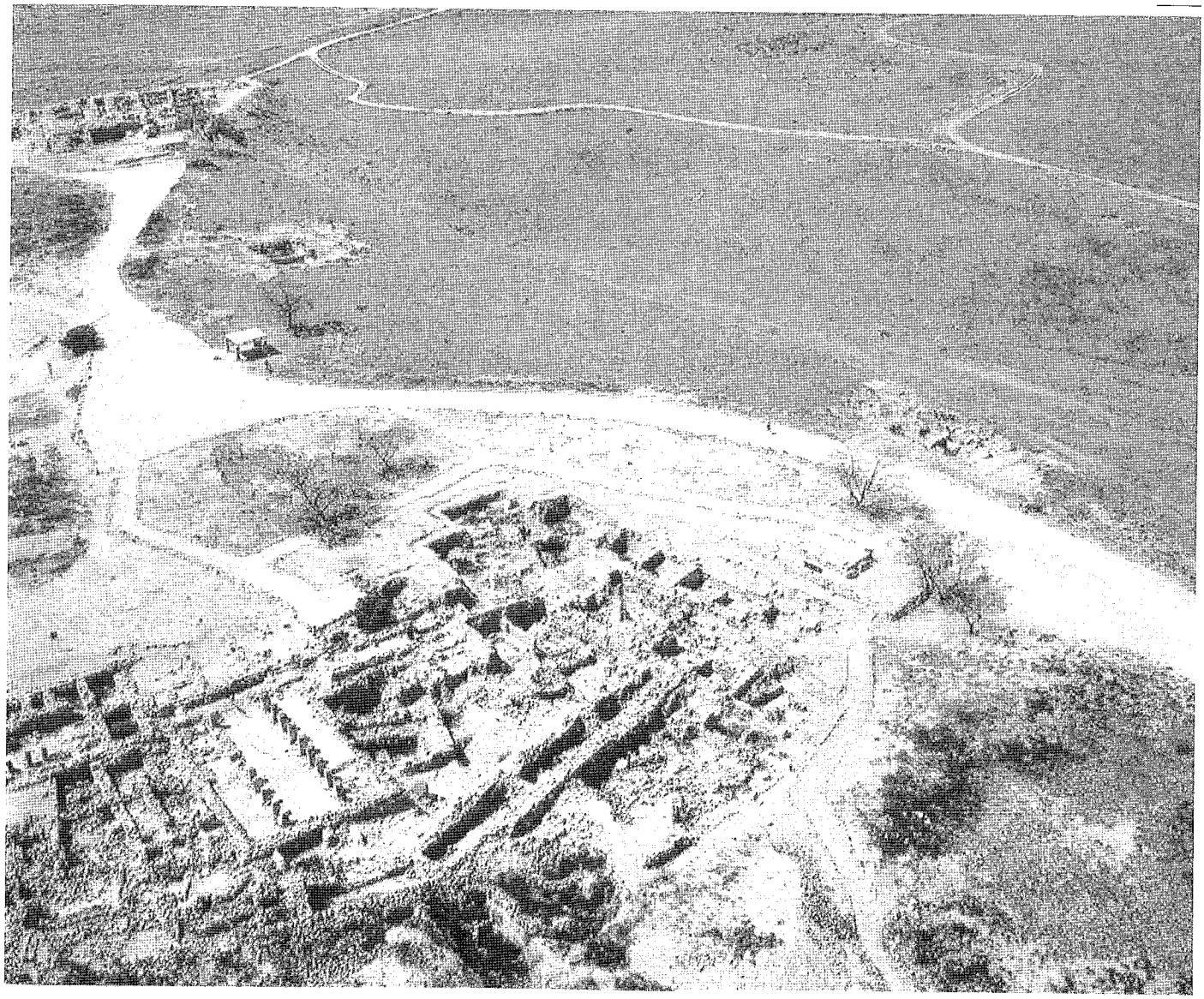
Presumably, Israel and Judah were, to begin with, two separate, independent kingdoms, frequently at odds with one another. The authors of the biblical account knew Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE, with its wall and rich culture, remains of which were discovered in various parts of the city, and they projected this late picture back to the era of the united monarchy. Jerusalem undoubtedly gained its central status after the destruction of Samaria, its northern rival, in 722 BCE.

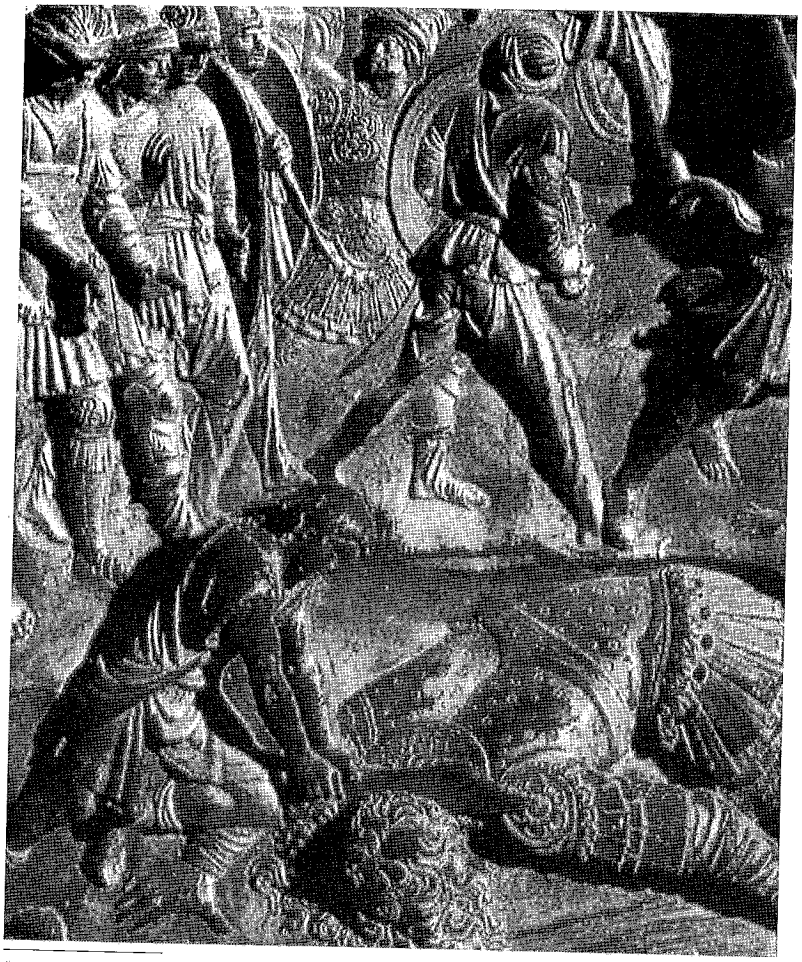
The character of material culture in the Land of Israel at the time of the United Kingdom would turn out to be even more meagre as a result of a proposal by Israel Finkelstein to lower the date of pottery assemblages, previously assigned to the tenth century BCE, to the ninth.[22] According to this proposal, with which many take issue, the era associated with the United Kingdom would be characterized by rural settlements lacking all regal splendour and all traces of royal administration.

Jehovah and his Consort

How many gods, exactly, did Israel have? Along with their historical and political implications, archaeological discoveries have provoked doubts about the reliability of biblical information on religious belief and cult. The question of when

Hazor





David and Goliath

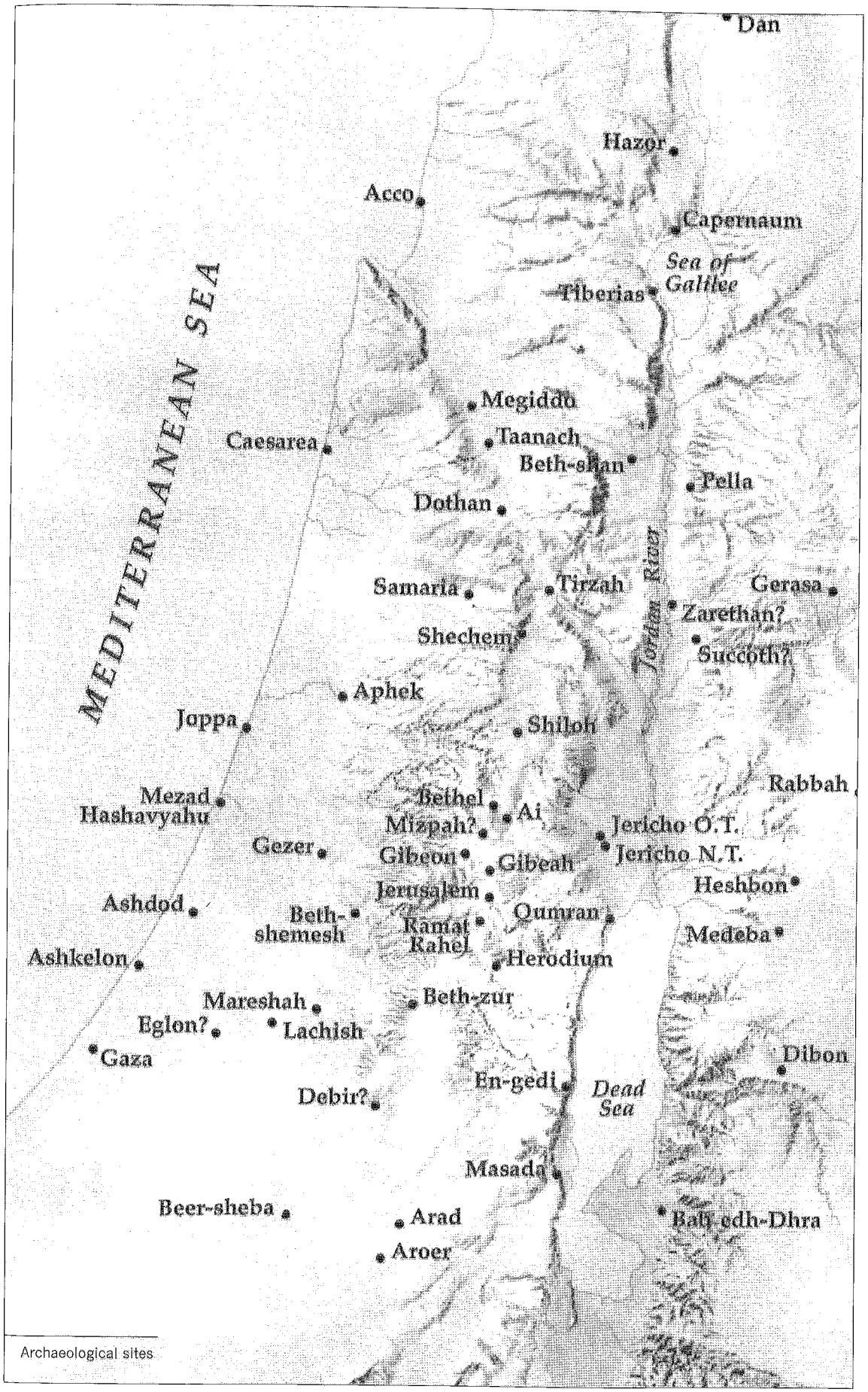
monotheism was adopted as an official religion in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah has arisen with the discovery of ancient Hebrew inscriptions mentioning a pair of deities: Jehovah and his Asherah. The inscriptions, found at two sites, Kuntillet Ajrud in the southern Negev highland, and at Khirbet el-Kom on the coastal plain of Judah, mention blessings in the name of the divinities: 'To Jehovah Shomron and his Asherah', 'To Jehovah Teman and his Asherah', and 'Jehovah my guard and his Asherah'. The authors of the inscriptions recognize a pair of gods, Jehovah and his consort Asherah, and offer blessings in the name of the couple. As the inscriptions date from the 8th century BCE, they corroborate the possibility that monotheism, as a state religion, is actually an innovation from the latter period of the Kingdom of Judah, following the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel.

There is no dispute between archaeologists and historians when we deal with the era of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. From the 9th century BCE onward archaeological findings support and even enrich our information about the era. For example, the existence of a shrine at Arad, the reality of an elaborate altar that was taken apart during an act of cultic reform, and the importance of a vast water works at Tell Beersheba.

How many gods, exactly, did Israel have? Along with their historical and political implications, archaeological discoveries provoked doubts about the reliability of biblical information on religious belief and cult

From Biblical Archaeology to Social Archaeology

Today, after seventy years of research in the 'biblical archaeology' approach, we have reached the moment for revolution. According to the analyses of Kuhn, a scientific revolution takes place when a large part of the scientific community abandons the old paradigm and adopts an alternative one. In truth, most archaeologists, biblical scholars and historians now agree that the sequence of events described in the books of the Bible: the exodus of an entire people from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, and the military conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, simply does not fit the facts known to us. For the last fifteen years the feeling has grown among scholars that the abundant archaeological data not only require detailed treatment, but demand a complete reconstruction of the historical process in a manner differing from the biblical account. Discussion about 'the origins of Israel' has returned to centre stage.[23] The revolution does not

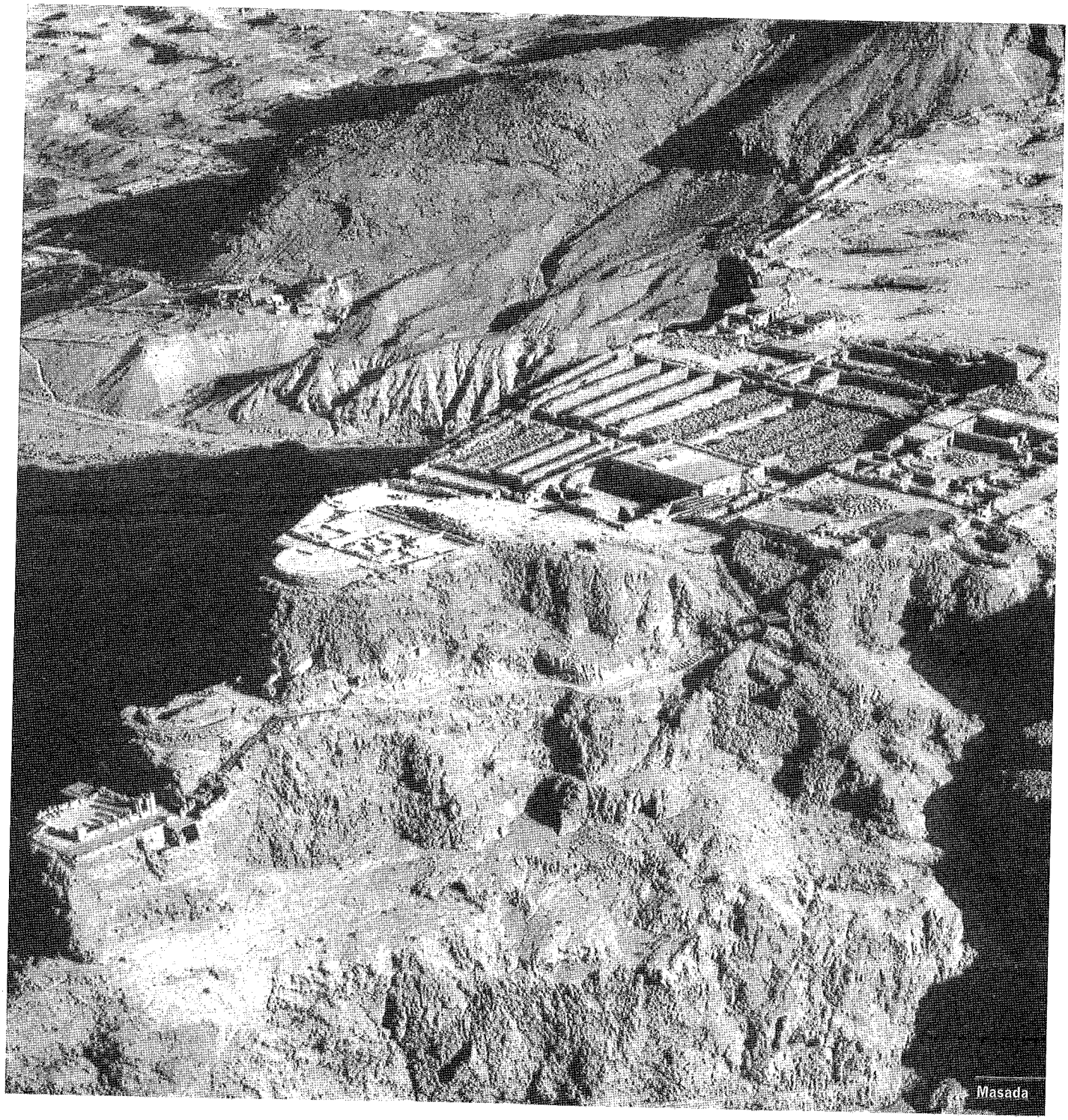


Archaeological sites

23. Long, V.P. (ed.) (1999), *Israel's past in present research: essays on ancient Israelite historiography*, Winona Lake.

express itself only in the effort to break away from the restraints of the Bible; it constitutes a major breakthrough of archaeology in the direction of the societal paradigm.

Social archaeology deals with questions bearing on the economic base of populations in the past, and it researches the social organization of communities, the economic basis of their existence, the domestic economy, the structure of the family, and the organization of institutions of authority in a society. The new approach regards archaeological findings not as the goal of research, but as a means for studying ancient society. It is not limited to identifying the typological and chronological characteristics of groups of findings; instead, it investigates processes of social change and their causes. New questions have stimulated the development of new research



Masada

Once archaeological research has attained its scientific independence, there is no way to subject it again to the biblical perspective

methods adopted from the natural sciences, and the implementation of spatial analysis and quantitative processing of archaeological finds.[24]

The archaeology of the Land of Israel is no longer an ancillary discipline in the service of biblical scholarship and historiography; it is now a discipline in its own right. This scientific revolution has provoked discussion of epistemological questions on the nature of science and its purpose. It has made it possible for us to examine our ways and reckon with the extent to which our researches, and even our conclusions, have been influenced by the paradigm of the 'biblical archaeology'. The critical and rational examination of archaeological finds, most of which have been known to us for years, is a result of this scientific revolution.

It is worth noting that the archaeological data accord well with the findings of biblical scholars. Critical study of the historical portions of the Bible treating the origin of Israel has revealed the ideological and theological tendencies that motivated the editors of the text at the end of the period of the Kingdom of Judah.[25] Historians, who base their research on an amalgam of biblical scholarship, ancient sources, and archaeological findings, in fact adopt the critical approach: 'The comprehensive conquest saga in the Book of Joshua is a fictive literary composition aimed at presenting the occupation of the entire Land of Israel, initiated and guided by the Lord and carried out by the twelve tribes under Joshua.'[26]

The decision to adopt a new paradigm is not easy. It obligates many of us to change our outlook as well as the interpretation that we have hitherto proposed for archaeological finds. The decision requires a readiness to acknowledge errors. For me decisions of this sort bespeak intellectual courage, and I reject the efforts to repudiate the credibility of scholars who are prepared to adjust their conclusions to the new data. A science based on entrenchment in traditional positions is a barren and complacent science.

It must be acknowledged that, as in every scientific revolution, there are scholars who have difficulty in abandoning their previous conclusions, and they try to re-examine them. Amihai Mazar has suggested choosing an 'intermediate way', one that seemingly offers a compromise between the extremes. But if the approach of Kuhn is adopted, there is no room for compromise in a scientific revolution. When the discipline has completed the paradigmatic shift, there is no way back to the old condition. The tradition of biblical historiography is founded upon a chain of sequential events. In the process of disproof, archaeological research has been breaking one link after another in the chain. What is left is a science in fragments, which may bear on ancient events of local, familial or tribal character, from various eras. The chain of biblical historiography, then, has been broken. Once archaeological research has attained its scientific independence, there is no way to subject it again to the biblical perspective. Each discipline must develop its own independent research, and only thereafter examine the significance of its findings for the other discipline.

Archaeology, the Bible and Israeli Society

The scientific discussion among archaeologists, biblical scholars, and historians has been ongoing for many years in the academic milieu.

24. Bunimovitz, S. (1995), 'How mute stones speak: interpreting what we dig up', *Biblical Archaeology Review* : 21, 58-67.

25. Amit, Y. (1997), *History and Ideology in the Bible*, Tel Aviv (in Hebrew).

26. Na'aman, N. (1994), 'The "conquest of Canaan" in the book of Joshua and in history', in Finkelstein, I. and Na'aman, N. (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: archaeology and historical aspects of early Israel*, Jerusalem, 280.

Nonetheless, the new findings and the resultant revolutionary conclusions have not reached the awareness of the public at large. This is an instructive episode in the interrelationship between academic research and society. As I see it, this is not an instance of academics' secluding themselves in the 'ivory tower', for many books and articles in Hebrew, as well as articles in the daily press, have been published on our subject. The difficulty stems from the central role of the archaeology of Israel in the formation of Israeli national identity.

The establishment of the state of Israel was conceived by its founders as a renewal of Israel's independence in its own land, after the era of the Monarchy and the Hasmonean Kingdom. The secular public, which rejected the halachic foundations of the Talmud, adopted the Bible as a means of confirming the connection to the Land of Israel, its ancient habitations, and its landscape, as well as to the flora and fauna of the Bible. The national festivals of Israel: Passover, Tabernacles (Sukkot), and Weeks (Shavuot) symbolized respectively the Exodus from Egypt, the Wilderness Wanderings, and the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Archaeology, which uncovered the remains of the biblical era both in practice and in theory, was perceived by the rationalistic Israeli as a science in practice, one that turned myth into historical reality. In the 1950s and 1960s, archaeology developed into a 'national hobby'. The excavations at Masada were undertaken with the assistance of the Israel Defence Forces and conducted by secondary school students as part of 'national service'. The biblical account of the beginning of the People of Israel, the Patriarchs, the Descent into Egypt, the Exodus from Egypt, the Receiving of the Torah at the Foot of Mount Sinai, the Wilderness Wanderings, the Conquest of the Land, the Wars of the Judges, and, of course, the glory days of the Kingdoms of David and Solomon, all acquired historical significance, the validity of which none doubted whatsoever.

In the course of the 1980s, archaeologists began to feel uncomfortable with the public's relationship to archaeology. Amnon Ben-Tor, director of the Hazor excavations, has well expressed this feeling: 'It would be nigh impossible to estimate the amounts of money and human energy wasted in futile efforts such as the searches for Noah's Ark on Mount. Ararat, the tomb of Moses at Mount Nebo, Pharaoh's hordes in the Sea of Reeds, or the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea, all fuelled by an irrational impulse to prove the historical authenticity of the biblical narrative... This intense urge to prove the Bible cannot affect the pious believer. For such a person the scriptures contain their own truth and need not be criticized or proven. This need is prevalent, in what must be construed as an irrational manner, among large segments of the secular public,

Archaeology, which uncovered the remains of the biblical era both in practice and in theory, was perceived by the rationalistic Israeli as a science in practice, one that turned myth into historical reality

27. Ben-Tor, A. (1992), *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, Yale University Press, New Haven. 8-9.

28. Herzog, Z (1999) article published in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 29th October, 1999.

Many Israelis fear that repudiating the historicity of biblical accounts will be taken as undermining 'our historic right to the Land'



Moses, tomb of Pope Julius II, 1513-16, by Michaelangelo

which find for it important that the archaeologists prove that all the events described in the Bible did indeed occur and that all the figures mentioned and the episodes described are entirely consistent with reality. There is in this demand a violation of archaeological integrity and an attempt to impose upon archaeology unattainable objectives - that is, the proof of faith.'[27]

The plain statement of Ben-Tor clarifies why the secular public has trouble in accepting the conclusions of archaeological, historical, and biblical research. An additional retarding factor is the political significance attaching to the results of scientific research. Many Israelis fear that repudiating the historicity of biblical accounts will be taken as undermining 'our historic right to the Land'. I beg to differ with this contention. First, I don't think that a scholar is likely to conceal his findings even if he fears that they may harm one political ideology or another. Scholarship under such duress is barren scholarship. Secondly, it must be stressed that even silence is a political statement. And thirdly, it is possible to draw political conclusions that emphasize the autochthony of the ancient Israelites, their inherent belonging to the Land, in that they did not arrive there as foreign conquerors. The feeling of nativeness among members of the younger generation of Israelis is free of the need to 'justify' the existence of the State of Israel on the basis of divine promises.

The extensive reactions to the publication of an article of mine in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* on biblical archaeology and the numerous conferences in which thousands of men and women have taken part, are testimony to the beginning of a shift.[28] The public at large is ready to open its eyes and gaze on scientific reality. Repudiating the historicity of biblical narrative may stimulate greater appreciation of its moral significance and of its literary quality. Perhaps, breaking clear of the claims of historical validity will allow a reconsideration of the human and universal ideas of the biblical narrative and of the prophets of Israel, and these will become the major concern of an enlightened public. The time has come to distinguish between myths, which exist in every society and fulfill an important cultural function, and historical reality. I hope that this article will contribute to strengthening the distinction between the mythical sections of the Bible and the historical truth uncovered with the aid of archaeology. ■

Translated from Hebrew by Howard Marblestone